

INTRO

# How to guide: building pathways to employment for migrants

Finding work is a key step for newcomers to personal autonomy and wellbeing and can positively influence many other dimensions of integration. There are many different ways to support newcomers in this journey, which typically involve a broad range of actors from national, regional and local government, NGOs and social partners. This multitude of actors and measures can create problems for newcomers to find their way and demands coordination. Being closest to the newcomers and understanding best the needs of local labour markets, cities are well placed to help existing policies and projects integrate into coherent, efficient and personalised guidance and support.

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## What is this topic about?

Creating pathways to employment at local level may involve providing information and orientation; bringing existing services together spatially and from an organisational point of view; building bridges between different mainstream and targeted services, mobilising and coordinating actors as well as identifying and removing obstacles that may make migrants' stumble on their way to self-sufficiency. This guide reflects the work done on this topic in the **CONNECTION** project, and focuses in particular on two key ingredients for creating pathways to employment at the local level:

**Mobilising employers to support migrants labour market integration, and reducing the gap between migrants' and labour market needs**

**Creating flexible and integrated support that is adapted to individual needs**

# Reasons why a city may want to explore this topic

Cities have an interest in ensuring that all their citizens can find a job that corresponds to their skills. This benefits the whole community in many ways:

- Unemployment tends to be much higher for migrants than for the overall population, which makes measures tackling this type of inequality a particularly worthwhile investment.
- Bringing migrants into work can reduce spending of city councils, which are usually in charge of social assistance, and increase local authorities' tax income.
- Helping migrants to find work can support integration in many other areas: it makes migrants self-sufficient, improves their language skills, increases their social networks and contributes to equal opportunities and social cohesion.
- Migrants can better fill skills shortages in the local economy.

The area of employment and skills is one of the four pillars of [the EU Action plan for Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027](#). The Plan sees an improved labour market integration of migrants as a key contribution to economic recovery and welfare and stresses the importance of better coordination between levels of government, social partners and other non-governmental actors. The Action Plan also underlines the need to speed up procedures for the assessment and recognition of qualifications and better options for training, reskilling and upskilling.



Providing better employment support for migrants can then be considered a common European goal. The context for local support, however, varies a lot across Europe.

**Key context factors consist of**

- National policy frameworks and institutions, e.g. public employment services, with their varying capacities to provide personalised support and to meet the specific needs of migrants
- Cities' competences in employment and integration
- Unmet labour market needs that exist in every city, but vary in type, scope and scale
- Migrants' skill sets, qualifications and abilities to work that differ from one city to another
- Migrants' rights to work and to access to support measures that depends on their residence status

# How to get started?

Policies supporting migrants to find work are manifold and involve a multitude of actors. The concrete pathway of a city council into this field will typically vary a lot depending on the specific challenges that are felt locally and what is already done by other actors. But here are some useful ways to get started:

1

## **Map and build a network of key actors**

You need to know actors and their work that are relevant for supporting migrants on their pathway to employment. Relevant actors may include, for instance, public employment services at national or regional level, national, regional and local employer and business associations, **migrant associations**, volunteer programmes as well as academic and vocational training providers.

Creating a local round table or partnership on migrant employment is one way to bring all of them together.

### **CHALLENGE**

Getting everybody on board can be a challenge. In particular it can be difficult to get national or regional authorities (public employment services, bodies responsible for the recognition of qualification) on board to form part of integrated local pathways to employment. In some cases, such as the Finnish government's trial on devolution of employment services to the local level, national governments are proactive in giving a coordination role to local authorities for efficiency reasons. In other cases, it takes strong leadership from local authorities to bring all actors together, including

those that are initially reluctant. Good arguments for getting regional and national institutions on board can be efficiency gains and to offer the local level as a testing ground for new approaches and cooperation, which can be rolled out if they show positive effects.

2

### **Identify obstacles migrants face in accessing employment**

From the perspective of migrants, identify the obstacles they face in accessing adequate employment. This can include a lack of knowledge and access to information about existing support, language learning needs, a lack of understanding of the job market, experience of discrimination, or a lack of awareness on how to have foreign qualifications recognised, but also personal circumstances that present an obstacle to take up work (e.g. care duties). This information must be gathered from migrants and migrant/community organisations in focus groups, interviews, and meetings with migrant-led initiatives that are likely to already be working on this issue. It is important to make sure the perspectives of different migrants are heard in this process to understand the particular barriers of groups such as migrant women, younger migrants, refugees etc.

3

### **Identify barriers to employment from employers' perspective**

From the employer perspective, find out what are the main reasons for not hiring more migrants and think about how they could be overcome. These can be, for instance, legal and technical obstacles - such as a lack of understanding of migrants' employment rights, a lack of understanding of existing support for hiring migrants or prejudice\*.

\*The MiFriendly Cities Project (co-funded by Urban Innovative Actions) explored employers' perspectives on hiring migrants in British cities, and found that "*almost all (96.1%) of respondents reported that they lacked confidence in employing migrants (including refugees) from outside the EU as they had not received training on the validity of documents which tell them who has the right to work*" and that "*almost a third of respondents (27%) had not considered employing refugees.*" ([here](#) - page 5)

### **Identify skills gaps and hard-to-fill vacancies**

Consult employers and employment agencies about skill shortages and hard-to-fill vacancies on the local labour market and think about whether they offer an opportunity for migrants who are out of work. What needs to happen to bring the two sides together?

#### **CHALLENGE**

Convincing employers that hiring migrants is good for their business can be a challenge. Many employers are reluctant to cooperate with city councils in recruiting newcomers, as many fear legal uncertainties and insufficient language skills.

How to mitigate this:

Cities that have managed to build lasting cooperation with employers, such as Tampere and Antwerp, have actively reached out to employers to build trust and established personal relationships. Providing Cities that have managed to build lasting cooperation with employers, such as Tampere and Antwerp, have actively reached out to employers to build trust and established personal relationships. Providing employers with opportunities to test working with migrants in subsidised job placements has also been a successful approach in reducing stereotypes.

### **Map case and data management systems**

Map the existing case and data management systems for jobseekers, their skills and qualifications and how they incorporate migrants and their specific support needs. Is there an established database for job matching and does it work? Can data be recorded and shared more effectively?

## Set objectives and design actions

Bring all actors together to develop a joint analysis of what are the main problems with the current support system and what would be the most efficient measures to improve it. Then set objectives and design actions jointly.

### CHALLENGE

Avoiding the impression that migrants are getting “special treatment”.

Whenever measures target exclusively migrants, it is important to explain to the wider public why this is the case and how it benefits the whole society, e.g. in a context of shortages. In some cases, individual success stories can help to illustrate how all parties involved (employers, migrants, the host society) benefit from employment support for migrants.





# The do's: what really works?

## **1 - See migrants - whether newcomers or established - as an asset for your city.**

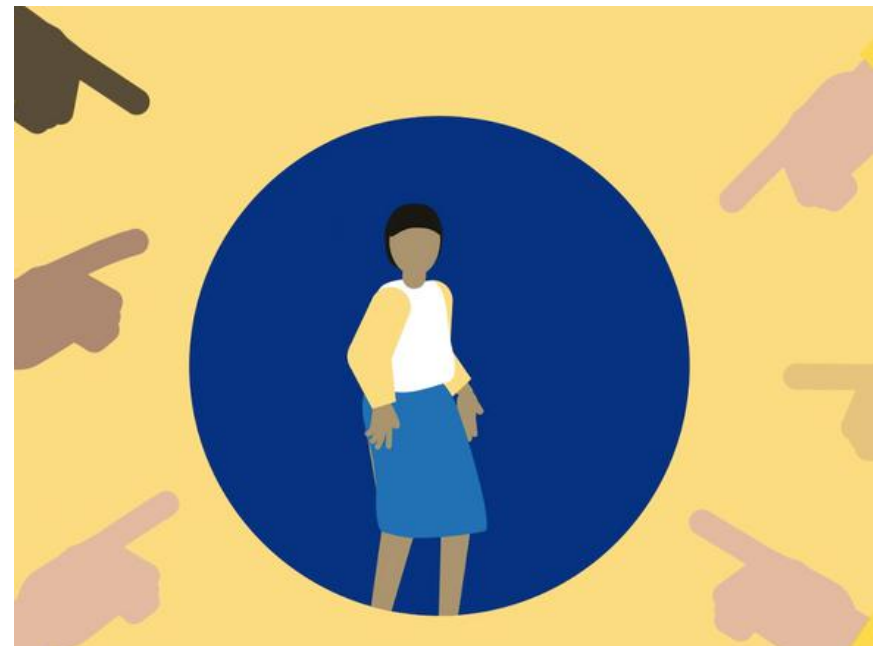
The solution to challenges that your city faces may well lie within the migrant communities. For instance, the city of Tampere has adopted a strategy for international talent attraction and migration, which sees migration as an answer to the city's labour market needs. The city's vision is to support all present and future migrants to the city with clear, tailored support structures, and to promote the new International House Tampere as go-to place for all services related to migrants.

## **2 - Provide personalised long-term support.**

Support works better when it is based on a stable, long-term and personal relation with migrants e.g. through job coaches or mentors: the time such support workers can spend with each client matters! Individual career plans can help to structure the support, making the envisaged trajectory to employment transparent and broken down into manageable steps.

## **3 - Offer a wide range of support options from one source.**

Support should be able to draw on a range of resources and include general labour market orientation, social support, competency mapping, language and professional training and work placements which are tailored to the specific needs of each migrant. This prevents migrants from being handed over from one service to another.



### **OMA Job Coaches in Tampere**

The OMA job coaches (OMA is an acronym of the Finnish words for competence, motivation, activation) working for the city of Tampere aim to provide personalised guidance towards work and education for unemployed migrants and newcomers. Each coach has around 120-130 clients and meet them regularly. During the pandemic, meetings were successfully held online, which inspired the city to move the majority of communication online, now only inviting clients to a physical meeting when this is essential.

OMA job coaches define the pathway into employment jointly with their clients. This leads to a personalised employment or integration plan, which is updated every 3-6 months. They have at their disposal a range of support including guidance to services, career coaching, competency mapping, work experience opportunities, Finnish language training, vocational training and education, and health and social support. Some of the services, such as training or rehabilitative work for clients with health-related impediments, are sourced out to NGO partners. They work hand in hand with Business Coordinators who liaise with companies in all sectors to better understand their needs and propose suitable candidates. The service is remarkable for the personalised support provided and the range of support offers that coaches have to hand, which together allow them to meet the needs of their clients.

### **4 - Take a holistic approach and consider the need for wrap-around and enabling services**

e.g. to provide childcare or care for the elderly, for bringing people into employment. The importance of such services is illustrated, for instance, by the case of Sofia, where the rapid integration of Ukrainian refugees into the labour market has been hampered by the lack of childcare in the city.

### **5 - Create one-stop-shops**

that integrate a variety of services and actors relevant for job seekers in a single place. Such services are a great tool to make employment support easier to navigate for clients, and at the same time align the support work of different actors and institutions. [Learn more about One Stop Shops](#)

### **Tampere Skills Centre**

The Tampere Skills Centre is a one-stop shop providing multi-professional support and guidance for work and study aiming to speed up the educational and employment paths for migrants. The centre conducts skills assessment, helps with further training, refers to language courses and facilitates access to labour in the region through individual job coaches. It is also a contact point for employers looking for workers.

### **6 - Create fast track training programmes for shortage sectors:**

dedicating some resources to helping migrants fill labour shortages in sectors with high demand can be a good way to get employers or chambers of commerce on board and get many migrants into work. Such programmes could include the recognition of migrants' qualifications and skills, professional and language training and placements or internships. If successful, such training programmes can be extended incrementally to other sectors.

#### **GOOD PRACTICES**



 ANTWERP, BELGIUM

**Joint assessment of newcomers' best trajectory towards employment carried out by the main public actors in Antwerp**



 ANTWERP, BELGIUM

**Rising You - The vocational training programmes that meet employers' & low educated newcomers' needs**



### **Rising you fast-track vocational training programme, Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent**

Rising you is a climbing club for youngsters turned into a fast-track training programme to bring young people into maintenance and construction jobs that involve climbing and abseiling.

## Specialised English courses to help medical professionals from abroad resume their careers Birmingham's

USE-IT! project (co-funded by Urban Innovative Actions) set up a skill matching programme to unlock a large hospital, the Midland Metropolitan Hospital, as an asset for a disadvantaged local neighbourhood.

### GOOD PRACTICES



BIRMINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM

USE-IT! Skills matching



FINLAND

Social Impact Bond on Immigrant Employment (Koto-SIB)



## 7 - Offer on-the-job language training

In particular for migrants who have acquired basic language skills, on-the-job language training that integrates language learning with work and professional training has been found to be a highly efficient measure. While too lengthy periods of classroom-based language training might make migrants lose touch with work life, an early contact with the destination country's labour market can positively contribute to social networks, autonomy and motivation, for instance. Their positive effects have been confirmed by the Social Impact Bond on Immigrant Employment in Finland and the Antwerp experience on integrating work and language training.

## 8 - Build relationships with employers

Employers can be key allies for cities, helping to achieve long term visions around increasing and improving migrant employment locally. Relationships with employers should be invested in, and trust should be built, so that cities can help employers to overcome uncertainties around employing migrants, and cities can better understand the needs of employers and of the local labour market. Successful city experiences in the CONNECTION project in Antwerp, Madrid or Tampere have in common that they are based on real match-making efforts from the side of the city, in which personal relationships with employers are established over time through regular visits and communication and where city staff takes good care to meet expectations both on the side of the worker and of the employer. Job fairs as the ones organised for Ukrainian refugees in Sofia can complement this work and help to find more cooperation partners among local employers.

**9 - Give employers who hire migrants, symbolic recognition** to strengthen cooperation with them and to promote their practice among peers. For instance, the city of Sofia runs an awards scheme for employers who work with refugees. These employers are also featured in an advertising campaign screened in social media and other channels. This symbolic recognition is popular with the employers featured and can help to reduce prejudice of other employers against hiring migrants.



**10 - Support migrants in the recognition of foreign qualifications.** The process of recognising foreign qualifications is typically a competence of national or regional ministries and professional bodies. Due to the complexity of the procedures, migrants can easily get lost in the process of finding the relevant institution and the right documents to hand in. Whenever other administrations fail to guide applicants, cities can fill this support gap, in particular when they are already providing employment support. In addition to providing advice, cities can set up further training courses together with educational institutions that bridge the gap between foreign qualifications and national reference qualifications, when the former are only partially recognised. Examples of support services for the recognition of qualifications in cities like **Barcelona** and **Munich** show a triple win: they help migrants to find work that corresponds to their skills; local businesses to find qualified workers and address labour shortages; and local authorities to reduce social benefit spending and to increase tax revenues, as migrants with recognised qualifications typically earn higher salaries.



MUNICH, GERMANY

**Foreign Qualification and  
Support Service**



**11 - Be an example for other employers in reflecting the city's diversity in your local administration.** It is important for the city to lead by example if it wants to convince employers to hire migrants. As one of many examples, the city of Nuremberg has set out as one of its guiding principles that “We are committed to ensuring that the diversity of the city's population is also reflected in the workforce of their administration and the municipal companies. We are therefore actively trying to increase the employment of migrant workers.” In order to achieve this objective, the city council has mainstreamed diversity across its human resources policies, which implied, for instance, defining and recognising intercultural competences in staff recruitment and appraisal, making recruitment campaigns more reflective of the population's diversity and working with schools and migrant associations to promote a career in the city council.

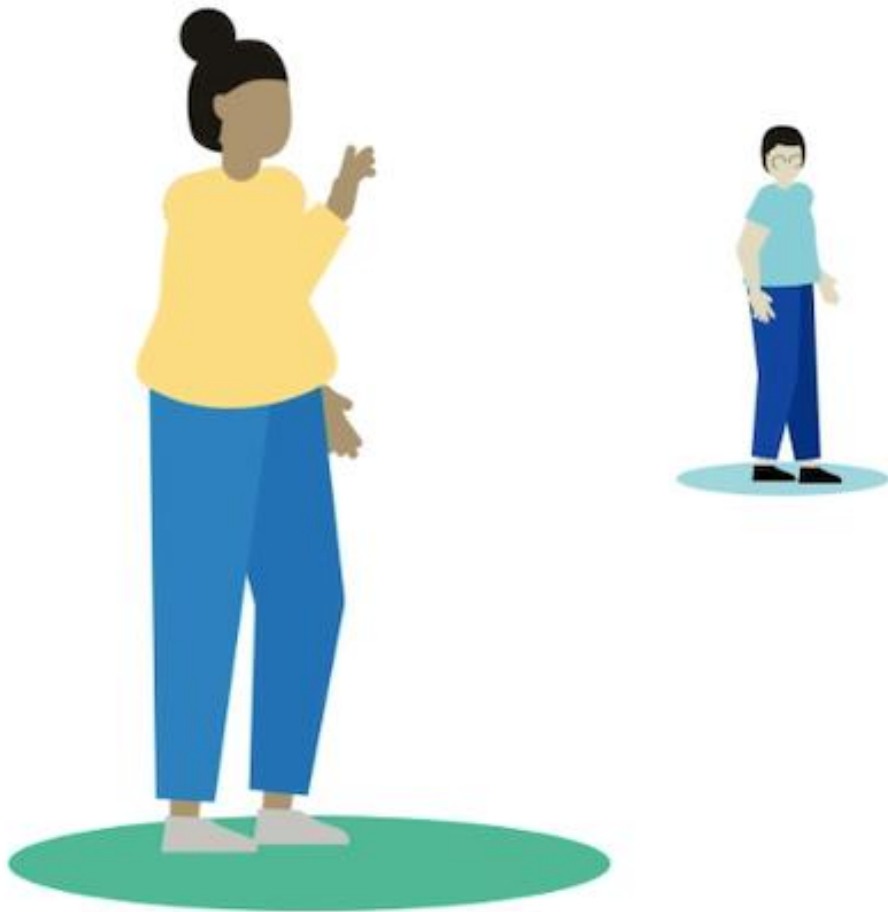
# The don'ts: what to avoid doing?

**1 - Don't do it on your own** – bringing people into employment is usually a task that needs to involve a wide range of actors to be efficient, and that cannot be done by a city council alone.

**2 - Don't let your city's lack of formal powers and competencies be an excuse for not acting on a key challenge, as nobody else might.** When there is a policy void, local leadership can provide the momentum for other levels of government to move into the same direction. For instance, the recognition of qualifications is a field where cities typically have no competence but can make a big difference in helping migrants when state or regional policies are not sufficiently supportive, and inspire other administrations to provide better support.

**3 - Don't assume that migrants will only be around for a short time.** Help them with getting ready for work from day 1, if possible, and find opportunities such as volunteering when migrants do not have a right to work. Thinking of your city as a place of transit might become a self-fulfilling prophecy and prevent your city from providing support for people who want to settle.





**4 - Don't provide integration support and training that do not have a clear practical value for migrants.** Experience with integration programmes shows that when they are too long, too generic and not sufficiently targeted to individual needs, they may effectively create “lock-in effects” and potentially prevent migrants in finding work rather than supporting them towards self-sufficiency.

**5 - Don't cream off the best talent and leave the most vulnerable and least skilled job seekers without support.** Supporting all migrants and the wider city population through flexible and individualised support contributes to labour market integration and social cohesion.

**6 - Don't end your support when an employment contract is signed.** Staying in touch with a migrant after recruitment not only helps them, but also your city: to learn how to improve employment support, to get to know employers and to prevent exploitation. In the CONNECTION project, the importance of keeping in touch with clients after they found a job was stressed, for instance, by workers of the employment programme in Madrid's local integration service and of Caritas' advisory service for migrants in Sofia.



# A city's real life journey: Sofia

Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria, is facing severe labour shortages in many sectors. In 2020, 68% of companies struggled to fill vacancies, particularly in the transport, services, hospitality, outsourcing, processing industry and health care sectors. Situated at the EU's external border and being a gateway to the EU for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, there is a potential supply of workers in Bulgaria, but employers were put off by uncertainty and fear about regulations, the possible administrative burden and a perception that refugees and other migrants saw Bulgaria as a country of transit and would move on quickly.

At least up to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, there was no developed national framework for integration that would facilitate refugees and economic migrants to find their footing in Bulgaria and help Bulgaria transition from a transit country to a country of settlement, and thereby also address some of the labour shortages. One of the reasons for the lack of initiative are widespread negative perceptions of migrants in Bulgarian society, which have made integration support to some degree a taboo subject. In 2016 the Government transferred all responsibility for integration to municipalities but did not provide any corresponding funding.

Against this backdrop, Sofia started to develop integration support for migrants on its own initiative, by funding NGOs with small grants. Using an implementation grant provided by the CONNECTION project, Sofia Development Association (SDA) decided to set up an information and advice one stop shop for migrants. This service, the first of its kind in Bulgaria, aims to tackle the lack of coordination in the city's provision of information and support, and to provide better visibility and predictability of service provision. SDA brought together Sofia Municipality, the Bulgarian Red Cross and UNHCR and developed a concept for the service through a series of public discussions and the support of more than 15 NGOs. Key to success was securing political commitment, which took some time.

A needs analysis concluded that the priority should be to avoid an overlap or duplication of services. This was achieved by establishing a management structure governed by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the main partners. The next step was to identify and refurbish a suitable venue. An empty shop owned by the municipal Vazrazhdane Markets fit the bill, conveniently located in the ethnically diverse Women's Bazar area, next to a market. A sticker on the door assured visitors that it was a "Discrimination free zone".

The Bureau for Information for Third Country Nationals opened on Sofia Day, 17 September 2021 for a one year pilot. Partners offered a range of services on site:

- Information and help accessing the labour market (CVs, consultation with employers, going to Job fairs)
- Help filling out documents e.g. for humanitarian help and other referrals
- Registration of applications for social assistance
- Legal assistance
- Accompanying doctors, government offices, banks etc.
- Psychological assistance
- Workshops and information sessions

These services were offered in a range of community languages, as well as Bulgarian: English, Ukrainian, French, Arabic, Farsi and Russian.

By June 2022 client sessions were running at about 80 a month. Housing advice had proved to be the most popular service, as access to housing was particularly challenging for newly recognised refugees after being evicted from reception centres, but the centre was seeing an increasing demand for legal help. Since the start of the conflict in February 2022, Ukrainians had replaced Syrians and Iraqis as the main client group and a Job Fair for Ukrainians was held.

The Centre is trying to introduce longer-term thinking in government departments by using the response to Ukrainian refugees to embed sustainable changes to municipal policies and practices. The Ukraine crisis had brought about a paradigm change: integration was now on the table, when previously the State Agency for Refugees was unable to discuss the topic.

The fact that Sofia had already built up networks of collaboration and tested support instruments by its own initiative, without the support of the national government, clearly helped the city to also become a pioneer in responding to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees.

In response to the challenge of recruiting employers the Bureau created an Awards scheme, which had attracted considerable media attention and encouraged employers to come forward. At a ceremony in December 2021 Awards had been presented for commitment to employing migrants, best attitude to mothers and women and the best combination of work and learning. In an imaginative twist, prizes took the form of subscriptions to the municipal theatre, in the expectation that employers would go with their migrant employees.

Plans for the future include

- Running a training course for community interpretation.
- A “Welcome to Sofia” event, in partnership with the Sofia Investment Agency, to help migrant workers feel truly welcome
- Developing a project to test social bonds/social investing.
- Exchange with and capacity building for other Bulgarian municipalities.

# **Good Practices on migrant integration into the labour market**

# Munich - Foreign Qualification & Support Service



## Lead Agency

City of Munich, Department for Social Affairs

## Context & rationale

This service responds to the problem of an underutilisation of migrant skills and qualifications, which causes lower employment rates, unemployment and overqualification (i.e. migrants working in jobs that are below their qualification) compared to the overall population. Today, most European cities face shortages at least in some economic sectors and have vacancies on the job market that could be filled if more skills and qualifications that migrants acquired abroad were formally recognised and “translated” into the country of settlement’s system of qualifications. In Bavaria, for instance, 63% of all businesses consider the lack of qualified staff as a risk for their business.

EU legislation provides a framework for the recognition of qualifications between EU member states and national frameworks regulate the recognition of qualifications from outside the EU. However, in particular in the latter case, the process of recognising qualifications is complex and laborious, and takes time. This is a result of different institutions, often at different levels of government, being responsible for different types of qualifications; but also of the sheer complexity of translating hundreds of formal qualifications multiplied with hundreds of countries of origin into reference qualifications of the country of settlement.

In the face of this complexity, a legal framework for the recognition of qualifications alone is often not enough for migrants who struggle to understand how the recognition of qualification works and who as a result shy away from the procedure. A survey with migrant citizens in 15 EU member states found that only 27% had asked for the recognition of their qualifications acquired in another country (Immigrant Citizen Survey 2013, Migration Policy Group).

The Munich Service Point provides personalised support and guidance in this complex process for residents of the city and its metropolitan area who have a foreign degree (vocational or university). Through this support it aims to ensure that they apply where they should and with the right documents, and also helps them in their first steps on the local job market in their field of qualification.

## Description

The service has been operating since 2009 and receives its core-funding from the municipality. As a first step, a person seeking advice completes an online form in which they provide key information such as the title of the formal qualification acquired abroad, the institution that granted the title and the desired field of work. Staff from the Service Point then provides advice in face-to-face and video meetings, via phone and email in all necessary steps for the recognition of the title. This includes advice prior to the formal demand of having a qualification recognised; and support after the procedure, if it leads to a partial recognition. In this latter case, the service can refer to additional training that is needed to acquire a full recognition of the title. Based on the needs that are detected in the service, specific training programmes have been developed with external training providers to complete the recognition process.

The support helps to prevent people with foreign qualifications from getting lost or stuck in the complex procedure for having a foreign qualification recognised and allows to speed up the procedure by guiding applicants better.

The service is embedded in the federal ESF-funded network “Integration through Qualification” (IQ-Netzwerk), which links up services related to skill recognition at different levels across Germany for knowledge sharing and support.

In the context of a new federal law on immigration of skilled migrants (the 2020 Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz), the city of Munich has created cooperation agreements with chambers of crafts, industries and trade, the labour office, and the foreigners office centred on its services to speed up clearing procedures for candidates. In this new legal context, the service point now also provides advice to businesses interested in the recruitment of skilled workers.



## Resources Needed

The service is currently staffed with about 15 FTE, two thirds of which are funded by the city. The remaining third is provided by the ESF-funded federal IQ-Network for the recognition of qualifications, which are used to support initiatives that complement the Munich service, e.g. a mentoring project.



## Results

Between 2009 and 2021, the service point had about 50,506 individual client contacts with a total of 23,261 migrants, which means on average about two contacts per client. Yearly numbers are constantly rising and have reached almost 6,000 contacts in 2021. Since March 2021, 26% of requests received by the service point come from Ukrainian citizens.

The main message behind these numbers is that the advice that the city of Munich provides pays off for both the city and individual migrants. In 2018, an evaluation of the service's individual and fiscal impact was commissioned from the Viennese Centre for Social Innovation, based on a representative survey with 1723 clients. The evaluation confirmed, firstly, the service's effect for individual clients who find work or a better paid job. For instance, clients with foreign medical professions could raise their monthly income by 1,100 Euros after their qualification was recognised. Secondly, the study also found that the service has a direct positive fiscal impact on the city budget in the form of lower social welfare payments and higher tax income from the clients. As a result, the resources that the city spends on the advice service are already "paid back" after three years only in the form of tax returns through the client's increased income. If all effects are taken together, the study estimates that the city's investment in the service point generates a return worth 500% of its investment.

This means, every Euro invested into the service brings 5 Euros of income to the city. The evaluation also found that the profiles of migrants using the service correspond well with the city's shortage sectors, which means that it helps to reduce labour shortages on the local job market.



## Success Factors

This service is an investment in building up the necessary technical know-how on the recognition of qualifications inside the municipality, and developing networks and contacts with key local partners (such as the chambers of commerce, trade and industry) and with the agencies in higher levels of government that are responsible for the recognition of qualifications.

Support for the local service through a proactive legal framework and leadership at national (and where appl.: regional) level is helpful: when the German government legally established in 2013 a right for each resident with foreign qualifications to have these examined, and conducted a more proactive information policy, this also improved the effectiveness of the Munich service.



## Risks & Challenges

The service could still be more widely known among immigrants living in the Munich Metropolitan area. For this purpose, cooperation with migrant organisations and a more proactive PR-work is envisaged.

In particular migrants who have been outside the labour market for a longer period of time would need a more intense accompaniment than the Service Point can provide at present. It is contemplated to raise the number of staff working in the service to be able to more adequately serve this target group, and to reduce waiting times of several months that all clients have at present to obtain advice.

## Do's

- The Munich service works best within a wider service offer that provides support to newcomers, but it should be provided by specialists and not by staff dealing with skill recognition on the side of other migration or labour-market oriented services
- Establish working contacts with national (and, where appl., regional) ministries or professional bodies responsible for the recognition of qualifications and training providers is key.
- Structured networks with these actors need to be developed to exchange on how to translate foreign into national qualifications.
- If there is already a well-functioning support service for the recognition of qualifications provided by other actors, your municipality does not need to set up its own service, but should rather improve referral mechanisms to this service.



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[Evaluation report](#) (in German), Wirkungsanalyse der Servicestelle zur Erschließung ausländischer Qualifikationen der Landeshauptstadt München, Zentrum für Sozial Innovation, 2018.



# Antwerp - Joint assessment of newcomers' best trajectory towards employment carried out by the main public actors in Antwerp

(Centraal Onthaalbureau Coevelt – Antwerp's one-stop-shop)



Antwerp, Belgium

## Lead Agency

- The City of Antwerp (overall coordination, social welfare department and work department)
- Atlas: public integration agency responsible for carrying out the Flemish integration policy for the City of Antwerp.
- VDAB: the public employment services of Flanders.

## Context & rationale

The one-stop-shop was set up in 2016. At the time, newcomers in the city followed linear integration trajectories, i.e. they got support like social orientation and language classes first, and then later moved on to job seeking. This meant that people stayed on social welfare benefits for a long time before they could be financially independent. The objective of Antwerp's newcomer reception office (one-stop-shop) is to activate newcomers

and foster their labour market integration in a way that is more tailored to the clients' profile and integrated with standard integration support. What the city of Antwerp wanted to do more particularly was to get services like language classes to migrants at the same time as helping them with job searches or vocational training, so that they can become active members of their new communities as quickly as possible ('integrated trajectory').

To achieve these integrated trajectories the Employment Service of Flanders (VDAB), the City's Work Department and Social Welfare Department, and the Integration Agency 'Atlas' implement a screening and intake process whereby they use each other's information, so clients are directed more quickly to the right trajectories.

The way the process works at this point differs from 2016 as context and budget changed.

The target groups of the service are migrants with a residence permit in Belgium who:

1. want to apply for social welfare benefits
2. live in Antwerp
3. moved to Antwerp in the last month
4. still need extra Dutch language support.

## Description

The service was created in 2016 through a European Social Fund project. Since 2020 it no longer receives any EU funding. Each partner in the one stop shop provides staff from their regular services. All partners are public government departments that have the obligation of helping those newcomers. As the one-stop-shop helps those departments to work more efficiently and quicker than if they would work separately, no extra costs are being incurred.

All client goes through the following steps – some of which take place in Antwerp's One Stop Shop (OSS), the Centraal Onthaalbureau Coevelt:

- The client willing to benefit from allowances registers to the service of social welfare
- A social worker of the Social Welfare Department interviews the client about his or her life (family situation, social network, finances, medical background, housing situation, education...) and plan another interview for the client ('intake') with the trajectory counsellor from Atlas, two weeks later.
- a trajectory counsellor from Atlas conducts an interview with the client in their own language about his or her professional qualifications, ambitions and plans.
- Atlas registers the client for Dutch classes and an integration program that are compulsory for newcomers in Belgium
- The social worker of the Social Welfare Department uses the information of Atlas to decide if the client qualifies for an integrated trajectory ('activation').

When the client is eligible for an integrated trajectory/activation, the social worker of the city Social Welfare Department creates a file with all information from both them and Atlas, to inform the City's Work Department ('Activation' Department)

- The Work Department (from the Unit Ondernemen en Stadsmarketing - OS - Entrepreneurship and City Marketing) invite the client into their own offices.
- The counsellor looks together with the client into the most suitable trajectory from a range of programmes available for all clients on social welfare benefits (e.g. 'VDAB trajectory': work or education in the regular economic circuit ; 'Artikel 60': temporary work for the city of Antwerp; 'Reinforcing trajectory': training to become stronger on the job market)
- The counsellor connects with the relevant service to discuss the trajectory and discuss with Atlas to adapt the language and the integrated trajectory
- All partners in the OSS are informed of the chosen trajectory



## Resources Needed

To put in place this cooperation, the City needed funding to test the idea of a one stop shop in 2015.

After the ESF funding, all partners saw the advantage of the cooperation and the advantages for the target group. The partners took advantage of helping newcomers in the one stop shop as they achieved their targets quicker and more efficiently. All partners are public government departments that have the obligation of helping those newcomers. That is why those services keep investing in the one stop shop, but each partner pays for his own staff and costs. The city incurs no extra costs, except the building of the one stop shop.



## Results

The OSS supports about 100 new clients every month. It has achieved a more work-oriented integration process for a significant number of newcomers. The new service has led to a more user-centred service provision model, in which clients benefit of a joint process. Clients are therefore screened and 'activated' as soon as possible. They do not sit and wait until they have acquired a certain level of Dutch and completed their integration programme before being redirected to the Work/Activation Department (in normal settings, a client would sit in the Welfare Department for several months before being guided to the Work/Activation Department). The fact that Atlas – the Integration Agency - sits in the same building and gather information about the client's life and aspirations is useful for the other counsellors and social workers. Information sharing is a key element in the one stop shop.

Social impact measurement of the procedure applicable up to 2020. [read here](#).



## Success Factors

- A coordination role is necessary to ensure that a common approach is developed between the partners (one of the main findings of the abovementioned study);
- Combining the perspectives of the partners in one common approach through good communication and regular meetings including informal and in person meetings;
- Partners need to get to know each other's working processes;
- Sharing the same building and having one single point of contact for all partners
- Clear communication to the target group about the process and responsibilities of each partner
- Interpreters/native speaking assistants are crucial during interviews, to dig into the wishes of the clients;
- Joint case management



## Risks & Challenges

- Lack of mutual registration system/ data sharing. A common server is important but is time consuming to set up.
- Lack of adequate figures on the impact of the OSS (e.g. how many people found a job because of the one shop stop and is this quicker than with regular trajectories?)
- Hard to find the balance between finding a job quickly and finding a sustainable and suitable job
- Continuing the partnership in regular services instead of a EU funded project
- Change of staff: make sure everybody understands the complete chain
- Looking for the 'gaps' of social services and find suitable trajectories. At this point, there are not enough trajectories to provide everybody a suitable integrated trajectory

## Do's

- Willingness to cooperate between main partners
- Being able to offer a range of training measures from basic integration and language support to more work-oriented support

### TOP 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Combining the perspectives of the partners in one common approach through good communication and regular meetings, including informal and in person meetings
- 2. Partners need to get to know each other's working processes
- 3. Sharing the same building and having one single point of contact for all partners



[Jolien De Crom, coordinator](#)



[CONNECTION video on Antwerp's One-stop-shop](#)

# Rising You - The vocational training programmes that meet employers' & low educated newcomers' needs



## Lead Agency

Benjamin Gérard (private initiative, partly financially supported by the city of **Antwerp**)

## Context & rationale

Every year, thousands of unaccompanied youngsters request asylum in Belgium. They come from Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria. 92.5% are boys and an estimated 75% is low educated. Welcoming and including them into Belgian society is a substantial challenge and the outlook is not very promising: without new solutions almost 2 out of 3 refugees will be unemployed in Belgium. On the other hand, the Federation of Belgian Enterprises repeats that there are a lot of job vacancies waiting to be filled, even for low skilled workers. The educational system and training programmes are not suited for low educated refugees. As a result, the talent and skills of these strong and motivated young adults remain untapped and the labour market is missing out on a lot of resources.

## Description

Rising You Belgium started first as a climbing club for youngsters – mainly refugees but not exclusively - aged 12 and above. In 2017 it also became a place for vocational training (first for jobs that involved heights (solar panels placement, telecom, industrial painting, jobs involving scaffolds ...) but has recently expanded to other trainings (eg removing asbestos, ground workers – shortage occupations in Antwerp and Brussels).

The training programmes are offered to groups of 12 participants. The programme is 3 to 6 month long and includes generic employability skills, language education, technical skills, safety training, rope techniques etc.

The design of the programme as well as the selection of the participants are quite innovative:

- Rising You looks for vacancies that could be matched with their target group (low educated newcomers/unemployed persons).
- They meet the employers that posted these vacancies.
- If the companies agree to pay a fee, Rising You co-designs with them a training programme that meet these employers' needs
- How are the 12 participants selected?
  - First Rising You organises info sessions about the upcoming programme: usually 60-70 participants attend the session. They explain what the job is, how much they would earn and emphasize that these are hard job.
  - For people interested, they organise small written and oral test (simple math and language exercises);
  - Those who pass are invited to a Test day (usually around 25 persons). Rising You and employers observe their behaviour, test their physical ability and carry out short interview. Then employers – sometimes on Rising You's recommendation – choose the 12 participants who will follow the training. Participants therefore know that there is a job waiting for them at the end of the training.



## Resources Needed

Rising You has a very complementary team with a solid track record in project management, empowerment programs, educational design, entrepreneurship, stakeholder engagement, impact management...the team currently covers: 1FTE project manager, 6 FTE trainers for technical skills, climbing and safety techniques, 1 FTE manager educational programmes, 1 FTE administration officer, 1 FTE trainee support service officer, 1 FTE business development manager, 1 FTE Chief Operating Officer and 1 FTE CEO. Aside from this team, Rising You works with freelancers on temporary basis (currently 10 different freelance trainers for vocational training). Rising You also relies on a broad network of volunteers. Currently 50 volunteers are involved in the climbing clubs (helping participants to find housing, help with homework, help them learn how to drive etc).



## Results

Rising You targets young adults, mainly refugees, with a low level of education. The employment rate after completion of the 6-month training programme stands at a remarkable 93%. Refugees are financially independent, have expanded their network and have strengthened their self-esteem. The programmes are constantly evaluated, from the participants' and employers' point of view.



## Success Factors

Conventional training programmes do not work for this target group. The methodology developed by Rising You takes into account the fact that some participants are not able to read/write in their own language, have a basic level of Dutch, need to build their confidence, and comes from a different cultural background. It includes a balance between experiential learning and cognitive training methods. The programme starts with a five-day retreat with the instructor to build group cohesion, create trust, help them learn about feedback in the workplace (something which might be culturally sensitive). They work in subgroups with different tools (visual instruction sheets, competence cards, and an app etc) to help them learn Dutch along the way.



## Risks & Challenges

Funding is always a challenge. Rising You is financially supported by the city of Antwerp, the Employment Agency of Flanders (VDAB) and foundations but mainly and - it is important - by fees paid by the companies with whom the training programmes are designed.



# Do's

## TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approach both your beneficiaries and the companies as your clients: address their needs.
2. Collaborate with companies and get to know them like you know your beneficiaries. Understand their challenges and expectations, so that you can design your programmes taking into account their wishes. Make sure you understand the vacant jobs, so that you can help companies re-assess their job requirements.
3. Aim high. Don't lower the threshold for your beneficiaries but adapt your training methods and your efforts in order to help them succeed. Don't treat your beneficiaries like victims: it wouldn't do justice to their resilience and strength.
4. Organise yourself in order to offer all support needed for refugees to access a job in a sustainable way. This includes support in all domains that could impact their employability: mobility, housing, administrative support, financial support, etc. Don't do what you can. Organise to be able to do what is needed. Don't forget to help companies as well. You will develop new successful ways of attracting, selecting, coaching and training low educated refugees. Be ready to share your knowledge, in order to support companies to hire your candidates. Get in touch with Rising You. They are looking to expand their model in other European cities and are eager to share their knowledge and programmes with you



[Benjamin Gérard – Founder](#)



[Rising You](#)    [video EN](#)

# Finland - Social Impact Bond on Immigrant Employment (Koto-SIB)

## Lead Agency

- S-Bank (Fund and intervention manager)
- Finnish Ministry of Employment (Commissioner)

## Context & rationale

Koto-SIB aims to tackle migrant unemployment in Finland, where the unemployment rate for this population is 2.5 times higher than for native Fins as it takes migrants 7-8 years on average to get into work.

Koto-SIB designed a job-oriented integration programme as an alternative to the ordinary integration curriculum to speed-up labour market integration of unemployed immigrants. The target population of Koto-SIB are registered unemployed migrants (with a special focus on refugees), which are 17-64 years old, can read and write and have a residence permit, but no Finnish citizenship.

## Description

Koto-SIB is a Social Investment Bond, in which a public commissioner pays investors according to the success of an intervention that addresses a social challenge. Koto-SIB attracted investments from the European Investment Bank (70%), the Finnish public innovation foundation SITRA (10%) and the retailing cooperative S-Group (7%), to which the fund and intervention manager S-Bank belongs.



S-Bank designed the intervention, a training geared towards a fast labour-market orientation in shortage sectors, which was implemented by a range of mostly private sector education and training providers. The standard integration support in Finland puts a long period of language learning first, and then follows with support for labour market integration. In contrast, Koto-SIB only provided the strict minimum level of Finnish needed for work in a 3-6 month class-room-based training, and then had language training run mostly in parallel with labour market training and job placements.

As part of this approach, e.g. trainees received specific support in industry-specific vocabulary, potential employers were already contacted during the training and employers who received candidates for job placements had to decide after 2-4 weeks, which is much earlier than in mainstream employment services, whether they would like to hire the candidate.

Occupations for which training was provided included typical Finnish shortage sectors such as logistics and warehousing, drivers, restaurant jobs, cleaning and property maintenance, care, construction work, industry. A separate programme was provided for immigrants with university degrees.

### Normal integration track



### Koto-SIB fast track model





## Resources needed

KOTO-SIB has a total budget of 14.2m Euros to train 2217 immigrants (which means something close to 7,000 Euros per person trained). It needs to be considered, though, that some of the resources also went into the experimental setup of the intervention, e.g. evaluation based on a randomised controlled trial with a 30% control group. This cost also needs to be put in relation to the benefits (see next section).



## Results

As a result of the intervention, 51% of participants were in employment (between 2016 and 2019) compared to 33% in the control group. A percentage of 67% of the participants had some kind of income bigger than 2000 Euros at the time of measurement. In addition to the effect of bringing more people into employment, these results also mean potentially more tax income for the state and less spending on employment support for those who found work.



## Success Factors

It is difficult to draw general lessons from the experimental setup of Koto-SIB. For instance, the evaluation cannot measure whether the result is due to its innovativeness and the better individual support of job seekers, or due to the specific incentive framework for service providers in the SIB-setup. For instance, the SIB allowed the intervention manager to change training providers that did not perform well and select new ones much faster than in the framework of an ordinary service contract. This means that mainstreaming the interventions outside a SIB would not necessarily produce the same positive results.

At the same time, the results raise some interesting points to consider in integration and labour market support more widely: they suggest that classroom-based forms of support and isolated language training should be reduced to the strict minimum for those migrants who are ready to work. Once a minimum language proficiency is reached, it might be more effective, in many cases, to continue language training on the job. The intervention also illustrates the great potential benefit of highly personalised support.



## Risks & Challenges

The Biggest challenge for Koto-SIB was to have enough participants in the programme. The Commissioner was two levels of governance away from the actual intervention. Customers were referred to by the employment offices which were not fully included in the planning phase. The first few years of intervention had considerably less customers than anticipated. These challenges were eventually overcome but due to a slow start, the overall goal of the number of customers was not reached.

The biggest risk for a programme like this is that people are pushed into jobs before their language level is at the minimal level. In the beginning of the programme some people started the language training from scratch and after 3 months of training they were given work practice positions. This was too soon because the customers felt that their level of Finnish was not enough. We later realized that the intervention works best for those who have already finished their integration (language) training provided by the public sector.

The programme had many blue-collar positions available but at the same time there were separate tracks for people with academic background and high talent. One of the biggest challenges is to find employment opportunities in between these two extremes. The programme had many blue-collar positions available but at the same time there were separate tracks for people with academic background and high talent. One of the biggest challenges is to find employment opportunities in between these two extremes. The reason for this is that in those positions you need a proficient level of oral and written Finnish and you cannot use only English.



# Transferability

A precondition for this intervention is a public authority providing a space and funding for experimentation, and investors bearing the risk of the intervention within a Social Impact Bond.

## Do's

- Have extensive dialogue with potential fund and intervention managers BEFORE the tendering process
- Tendering process: Use the tendering by negotiation or similar process.
- Use open book principle when tendering. Make sure to compare financial models including cost of the intervention and impact on public costs.

## Don'ts

- You cannot set all the parameters beforehand. Make sure to plan the tendering so that there is room for pivoting.
- Don't set any constraints to intervention programme. Concentrate on the results not on the process of how those results are done.

## Top 3 recommendations:

1. Spend more time on careful planning of the programme. Make sure that incentives are aligned
2. Make sure that every key stakeholder is committed to working towards successful intervention. Especially all levels of governance including the level which is responsible for customer referral
3. Plan the tendering process so that there is possibility to change the course of the programme. In other words, don't set the parameters in stone



Samir Omar – Koto-SIB Head of intervention from S-Bank



<https://kotosib.fi/en/>

# Birmingham

## USE-IT! Skills matching

### Lead Agency

Key partners included Birmingham City Council, the University of Birmingham & Brushstrokes Community Project and were led by Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

### Context & rationale

Traditional approaches to regeneration had not delivered lasting change for Ladywood and Greater Icknield, a deprived area of Birmingham with persistent poverty. Nearly 40% of the population were born outside the UK and the employment rate was only 48% compared to the UK rate of 62%.

The USE-IT! project, supported by the EU's Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) programme, tried a new, community wealth-building approach, based on the principle that the physical, financial and human assets of a place can be leveraged for local economic benefit. Macro-assets, such as large buildings, construction and housing development projects needed to be connected to micro assets, such as skilled and talented people in the community, social entrepreneurs and community businesses.



Birmingham, United Kingdom

Specifically, USE-IT! set up a skills matching programme to unlock a large hospital, the Midland Metropolitan Hospital, as an asset for the local community. The hospital had a chronic problem in recruiting and retaining qualified staff and the project wanted to demonstrate that even in communities classified as highly disadvantaged there are still assets of incredibly high value.

Previously, employment programmes had focussed on moving individuals into employment as quickly as possible. USE-IT! aimed to provide people with higher grade employment opportunities by providing individually tailored packages of support and being prepared to invest in them over a longer period of time.

## Description

USE-IT! was a 3 year project, set up in 2017 to help address poverty in a highly disadvantaged and highly multi-cultural neighbourhood in west Birmingham. USE-IT! combined five different approaches to address poverty one of which aimed to help unemployed, medically qualified refugees and migrants in Sandwell and west Birmingham find work in the NHS.

It built a bridge between a large “anchor institution”, the hospital, and local expert, community-based organisations. It identified medical professionals with overseas experience and qualifications living in the area who could be matched with jobs.

The project offered participants:

- Free advanced English language courses;
- support with social issues such as housing, benefits and legal advice; and
- work experience (unpaid) in a clinical environment.

A small initial partnership grew organically to about 50 community-based organisations.



## Resources Needed

- Funding for the higher level language training. On average this cost £5,000 (just under €6,000) per participant.
- A two person hospital employment team working in the community and providing each participant with both 1:1 mentoring and a tailored support package.
- Senior management buy-in.
- A provider of the language training that also understands the other difficulties refugees and migrants have to deal with.
- A network of community based organisations that have the trust of migrant and refugee communities.





## Results

More than 250 people from 36 countries were helped to start resuming their medical careers, putting much needed resource back into the local health service. The original target was 60 people. At the time of the project's evaluation, 235 highly skilled migrants had been engaged in the project; 104 went on advanced English language courses aimed at preparing for higher education or work in health care; 19 had placements in the National Health Service (NHS); 52 had paid work in the NHS or other healthcare setting.

Since the original USE-IT! funding ended, the NHS has continued to fund the programme and helps, on average, a further 70 overseas health professionals per year.

Other benefits for participants included:

- the opportunity to take vocational English courses that they could not otherwise have afforded;
- Peer support and new friendships;
- Learning relevant English vocabulary
- Renewed motivation to find employment aligned with their skills;
- Help to integrate into the wider community and “refind” their identity.



The hospital has adopted the same collaborative approach to creating jobs for other high need communities. This includes care leavers, ex-offenders, young people experiencing homelessness and young people with autism.

An evaluation of the USE-IT! project found:

- its individualised, outcome focused approach was more effective than national Welfare-to-Work programmes;
- the key element that distinguished it from other employment programmes was vocational language classes;
- the methodology should be rolled out to other areas with similar demographics



## Success Factors

- Senior managers in the 'anchor institution' (the hospital) embraced the approach to supporting refugees into medical roles and were open to changing policy to enable the approach to succeed. This led to policy and cultural change in recruitment practice.
- Community organisations already existed that could publicise the project and support participants: they just needed to be brought into a partnership;
- The 1:1 support offered by the hospital's employment team. This was essential as the circumstances of the participants were constantly changing.
- A structure that allowed new partners to join without being disadvantaged because they were not involved at the start enabled the project to attract new partners
- The programme brought together a lot of isolated individuals who then became a self-supporting group.



## Risks & Challenges

Once the funding for the language training was organised there was only one real challenge and that was the length of time the language training could take. For some participants it could take two years to achieve the level of language qualification required for them to work again at their level of professional practice. This created problems, such as:

- They still needed an income;
- Loss of confidence or motivation;
- Their circumstances changed due to their migrant/refugee status (eg they were forced to move home).

USE-IT! addressed these challenges by:

- Being very creative to help participants find temporary work in the health sector even if it was below their professional status, for example in social care;
- Providing 1:1 support and mentoring;
- Creating a network of community organisations that could respond to these changing needs in terms housing, legal, benefits advice etc.

# Transferability

The project demonstrated that there is a low cost and sustainable way of sourcing employment opportunities in high-need communities. Its success led to the introduction in 2019 of a £300,000 (€358,000) “overseas health professionals” programme in the Black Country area of the West Midlands, supporting an additional 70 people per year. With the help of URBACT funding, Birmingham City Council is setting up USE-IT! #2 in East Birmingham and USE-IT! is being adopted by three other European cities: Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Poznan in Poland and Trapani in Sicily.



[Conrad Parke](#)



[USE-IT! skills matching overview](#)

[Impact Evaluation](#)

[Linking macro and micro assets for urban transformation USE-IT! transferability study](#)

Article: [How retraining refugees could help tackle NHS staffing crisis](#), the Guardian, 13 Feb 2019

## Do's:

- Work in genuine partnership with specialist community-based organisations, building trust with existing organisations, rather than try to create new ones.
- Invest in staff in ‘anchor institutions’ who have the skills and capacity to bridge the gap with local organisations and
- Challenge the culture of employing organisations where managers may not understand migrants’ slightly different experiences and career pathways. In this case, some parts of the National Health Service had a hierarchical, bureaucratic and unwelcoming culture.

## Don'ts:

- Don't wait to develop a comprehensive database of possible partner organisations as it will never be comprehensive, will immediately be out of date and will slow down progress while the database is being developed.
- Top three recommendations:
- Find a training provider that is genuinely interested in the individual and not just the numbers.
- Be brave and creative in finding ways to help the participants gain experience and income while they are still doing their language training.
- Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate. By the time the three years had finished the whole Hospital Trust was supporting the project.

# Further readings on labour market integration of migrants

K. Hooper, M. Vincenza Desiderio, B. Salant, [Improving the Labour Market Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Empowering Cities through Better Use of EU Instruments](#), Migration Policy Institute Europe, March 2017.

R. Konle-Seid, G. Bolits, [Labour Market Integration of Refugees: Strategies and good practices \(europa.eu\)](#), European Parliament, IP/A/EMPL/2016-08, March 2016.

MiFriendly Cities Project, [Employers' Guide: A guide to assist employers in attracting, employing and harnessing the skills of migrants and refugees](#), 2020.

MiFriendly Cities Project, [A Briefing paper on Innovative Ideas to Employment](#), 2020.

# Glossary

General note on use of 'migrants' across all How-to Guides: The term 'migrants' is used to speak about all people who have moved from one country to another, including refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants and migrants of any other immigration status, unless otherwise specified

## **Migrant associations**

These terms are used to describe organisations that have been set up and run by migrants, or specifically migrant women, in the interests of supporting fellow migrants and advancing their interests in the society. These may be general for all migrants or they may exist for specific communities.

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